

**By Aamer Madhani**

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2010-06-01-iraq-christians\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2010-06-01-iraq-christians_N.htm)

The **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom**, a government panel tasked with monitoring religious freedoms around the world for the State Department, recently recommended that Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton designate Iraq as a "country of particular concern" because of the violence against Christians and other religious minorities.

The commission made the same recommendation in 2008, but then-President Bush did not act on it. With such a designation, Iraq potentially would face economic and military sanctions, according to the commission.

Leonard Leo, chairman of the commission, said even if the administration doesn't impose sanctions it has the leverage to push the Iraqi government to do a better job protecting minority rights.

"The big problem in Iraq is that there is a climate of impunity," Leo said in an interview. "We provide an enormous amount of aid and that can be used to push the Iraqis to calibrate and bolster some of the policies to protect Christians and other minorities."